THE
CATHOLIC RADICAL

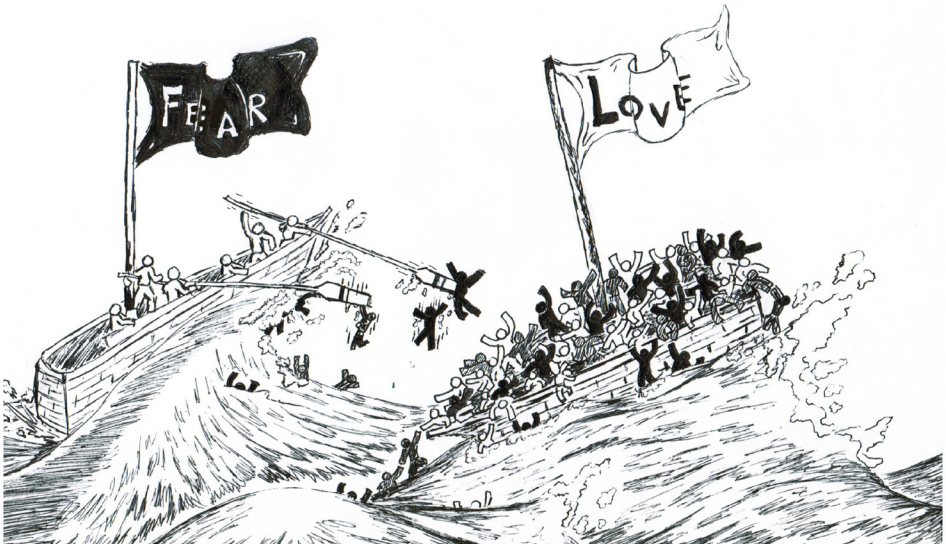
"...to foster a society based on creed instead of greed." Peter Maurin

February/March 2015 ***Price: For whatever it's worth.***

Love in the Time of Ebola

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

Some Americans responded to the ebola epidemic in west Africa by offering to care for the victims. Unfortunately, most of us were swept up in fear of the disease's dreadful symptoms and mortality rate.



Aiden Duffy

Proposals circulated to block all flights to and from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. Emblematic of the hysteria, a Catholic school teacher and registered nurse from Louisville, Kentucky was forced to resign after returning from a medical mission to Kenya, even though she was never closer than 3,000 miles from the ebola outbreaks.

Fundamental changes in how we treat African visitors and returning medical volunteers were proposed for a disease that ultimately killed only two people on US soil. One can only imagine the draconian measures that would be adopted in a real pandemic.

Those who doubt that Americans would jettison cherished civil liberties and human rights in a crisis need only read the highly redacted report on the CIA's use of torture after 9/11. In response to the murder of 2,977 people, we killed more than a half million Afghans and Iraqis in undeclared wars; we violated the Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo and elsewhere; we sanctioned drone assassinations of terror suspects, including American citizens; we allowed the government to engage in widespread warrantless surveillance; and we militarized our police forces. Who knows what kind of a fascist state we might now be living in had 9/11 been more than an isolated attack.

Christian ideals tend to get set aside in tough situations. When soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew and used his sword. When the Roman Empire was threatened with invasion, the Church adopted the Just War Theory. After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, most Catholic Workers parted company with Dorothy Day on pacifism and enlisted in the military. During the Cold War, Catholic

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Thoughts After a Fall

by Joan Thomas

Editor's Note: The author is a writer from Arizona and the widow of the renowned Catholic Worker, Ammon Hennacy. The prayer she references is the Anima Christi, *a 16th century prayer, often attributed to Saint Ignatius of Loyola.*

Water from the side of Christ, wash us... with water due to the piercing of the spear by the Roman soldier. Till now, I've fussed with the nails—hands, feet—old wounds, and, years ago, brain surgery after a bicycle accident demanded the crowning of thorns pushed down with bonding-steel force. But, this "spear" does seem the most painful. It came from the stupidest fall I've ever had. I tripped on a table leg and crashed down on the diabolically hard cement slab of my apartment floor covered only by cheap thin industrial carpeting.

I fell on October 12, and off to the nearby hospital I was hauled to have the right femur repaired and right hip replaced. I came home on the 16th because I adamantly refused to go (as more obedient patients do after this type of surgery) to a rehab center.

My companion of more than three years is a Vietnam veteran who, having gotten trashed far worse than I've ever been (his chronic pain level never falls below 8 and is often 10) continues to walk (as I do). He is why they let me go, probably making silent bets that I would be back. Also, in addition to not living alone, I did okay with the walker they gave me. Whereas my pain level, before the operation was ten at times, now it's never more than 8 or 6. (How can a level

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CATHOLIC RADICAL

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Love

(Continued from Page 1)

ethicists lifted the duty to be hospitable when one's family was hunkered down in a bomb shelter after a nuclear strike.

Like vegetarians between meals or pacifists between wars, we make the sign of the Cross at Mass and pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," but flinch outside church when we are faced with the challenge to love real enemies or to be hospitable to the destitute, the prisoner, or the sick. And yet, from lepers to the very people who crucified Him, Jesus never varied His loving approach.

For most of us though, tough situations inspire more fear and anger than love. Fear causes us to exaggerate risks. Ebola becomes the most virulent plague in history. Anger lets us demonize others. Osama bin Laden becomes another Hitler. As rhetoric escalates, it becomes harder to espouse hospitality or nonviolence. Anger was so high after 9/11, that television commentator Bill Maher was fired for asking what bin Laden's motivations were. To even hint that US policy might be partially at fault was unacceptable. The mantra that bin Laden was simply "evil" made war inevitable.

And now we are faced with the killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed, black 18-year-old, by Darren Wilson, a white police officer. Brown was one of an increasing number of black males killed by police. After a grand jury failed to indict Wilson, some people went into a riotous rage. Anger at police escalated. A month later, two New York City police officers were killed by an unstable individual in retaliation for Brown's death. And now police, who really do need to acknowledge a problem with racism, have become extremely defensive. NYC police officers at the funerals for their murdered colleagues, turned their backs on Mayor Belasio for his rhetoric against police brutality. Angry responses to Brown's death have hardened battle lines and made conflict resolution less likely.

Thankfully, some have clung tightly to their ideals. On the cover of the Winter 2014 issue of the Saint Louis Catholic Worker community's newsletter, *The Round Table*, there is a photo of black protesters in Ferguson holding a banner which reads: "WE LOVE YOU, NO MORE 'US' AND 'THEM,' WE ARE ONE." With Brown's body lying on the street for four and a half hours, it's hard not to give in to rage, to forget that the police are our brothers and sisters, but it's not for nothing that the Scripture warns, "**The sun must not go down on your wrath. Do not give the devil a chance to work on you.**"

By rejecting demonization, we open the space to consider police brutality in the context of a society awash in guns, plagued by war and increasing economic and racial inequality. Without justifying his murder, we even have to consider Brown's belligerence when confronted by Wilson. When we make the effort to see through the eyes of our opponents, the bond between us can be restored. This does not mean that there aren't systemic injustices to address or that one party is not at fault, but only that reconciliation requires understanding of all sides. And people are more likely to accept criticism when they aren't being demonized.

Ade Bethune

As Catholic Workers, keenly aware of the plight of victims from racism, classism, colonialism, militarism, sexism, etc., we have to stretch ourselves to recall the fact that the perpetrators are spiritual siblings to whom we are irrevocably bound. We are hardly immune from moral compromise born of us-them thinking.

Thankfully, fear has not overcome all Americans. The town of Amherst, Massachusetts has offered to accept prisoners from Guantanamo. Massachusetts' Governor Deval Patrick cited scripture last year when he offered to host unaccompanied immigrant children. Dr. Richard Sacra, doctor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, who recently recovered from ebola he contracted in Africa, is returning to Liberia. A Worcester mortician named Peter Steffan ignored the vindictive mob that refused a decent burial for the Boston Marathon bombing suspect Tamerlan Tsarnaev. Against expectations, Steffan's example of human decency helped calm fear and restore sanity. As Saint Luke says, "**Fear is useless, what is needed is trust**."

When the Israelites had their backs to the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army bearing down on them, they complained bitterly to Moses, "**Were there no graves in Egypt that you must lead us out to die in the wilderness?**" But Moses replied, "**Have no fear! Stand firm, and you will see what Yahweh will do to save you today.**" His faith leaves room for God to intervene.

Maybe we can better emulate Moses' faith if, when faced with a crisis, we force ourselves to take a breath and to beg the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide us. And then, no matter how unreasonable or frightening it seems, we can find the grace to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, care for the sick, bury the dead, free the prisoner, and love the enemy. Ω

A World Without Nuclear Weapons

by Pope Francis

Editor's Note: Pope Francis delivered the following address on December 7, 2014 at the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.

Nuclear weapons are a global problem, affecting all nations, and impacting future generations and the planet that is our home. A global ethic is needed if we are to reduce the nuclear threat and work towards total disarmament. Now, more than ever, technological, social, and political interdependence urgently calls for an ethic of solidarity (cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38), which encourages peoples to work together for a more secure world, and a future that is increasingly rooted in moral values and responsibility on a global scale.

The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons are predictable and planetary. While the focus is often placed on nuclear weapons' potential for mass-killing, more attention must be given to the "unnecessary suffering" brought on by their use. Military codes and international law, among others, have long banned people from inflicting unnecessary suffering. If such suffering is banned in the waging of conventional war, then it should all the more be banned in nuclear conflict. There are those among us who are victims of these weapons; they warn us not to commit the same irreparable mistakes which have devastated populations and creation. I extend warm greetings to the *Hibakusha*, as well as other victims of nuclear weapons testing who are present at this meeting. I encourage them all to be prophetic voices, calling the human family to a deeper appreciation of beauty, love, cooperation, and fraternity, while reminding the world of the risks of nuclear weapons which have the potential to destroy us and civilization.

Nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence among peoples and states. The youth of today and tomorrow deserve far more. They deserve a peaceful world order based on the unity of the human family, grounded in respect, cooperation, solidarity, and compassion. Now is the time to counter the logic of fear with the ethic of responsibility, and so foster a climate of trust and sincere dialogue.

Spending on nuclear weapons squanders the wealth of nations. To prioritize such spending is a mistake and a misallocation of resources which would be far better invested in the areas of integral human development, education, health, and the fight against extreme poverty. When these resources are squandered, the poor and the weak living on the margins of society pay the price.

The desire for peace, security, and stability is one of the deepest longings of the human heart. It is rooted in the Creator who makes all people members of the one human family. This desire can never be satisfied by military means alone, much less the possession of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Peace cannot "be reduced solely to maintaining a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 78). Peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, the participation of all in public affairs, and the building of trust between peoples. Pope Paul VI stated this succinctly in his Encyclical *Popularum Progressio*: "Development is the new name for peace" (76). It is incumbent on us to adopt concrete actions which promote peace and security, while remaining always aware of the limitation of short-sighted approaches to problems of national and international security. We must be profoundly committed to strengthening mutual trust, for only through such trust can true and lasting peace among nations be established (cf. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 113).

In the context of this Conference, I wish to encourage sincere and open dialogue between parties internal to each nuclear state, between various nuclear states, and between nuclear states and non-nuclear states. This dialogue must be inclusive, involving international organizations, religious communities, and civil society, and oriented towards the common good and not the protection of vested interests. "A world without nuclear weapons" is a goal shared by all nations and echoed by world leaders, as well as the aspiration of millions of men and women. The future and the survival of the human family hinges on moving beyond this ideal and ensuring that it becomes a reality.

I am convinced that the desire for peace and fraternity planted deep in the human heart will bear fruit in concrete ways to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all, to the benefit of our common home. The security of our own future depends on guaranteeing the peaceful security of others, for if peace, security, and stability are not established globally, they will not be enjoyed at all. Individually and collectively, we are responsible for the present and future well-being of our brothers and sisters. It is my great hope that this responsibility will inform our efforts in favor of nuclear disarmament, for a world without nuclear weapons is truly possible. Ω

After A Fall

(Continued from Page 1)

of pain be genuinely numbered? The pain level of Christ hanging on the Cross, for instance? Beyond all imagination as such things must be.)

All my life I've had brave men and women as examples of courage. Of the dead: paternal grandfather; father; maternal grandmother; mother; of the living: my younger sister (who lost an eye in a freak accident out of hell); my youngest niece (whom I'm convinced is an unacknowledged saint); to my present companion who, incidentally, is a born Catholic who has offered up his suffering for years and never misses the 9 A.M. Mass for shut-ins.

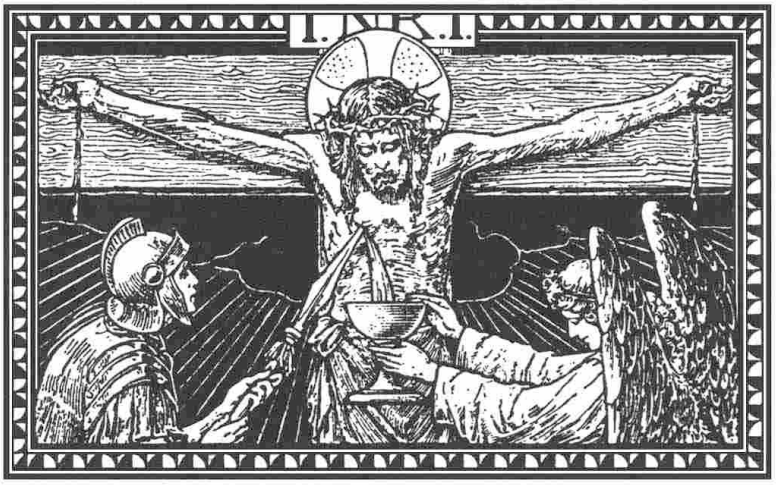
I was welcomed into my 80th year with seeing this accident as a blessing, as I view all my life, from the Hands of God. I do not want to fuss with theological claptrap about the will of God, the permissive will, our free will, or puppet-hood. The long ponderings, weak and strong, I've had for years continue to be totally positive with this fall. I offer my suffering up for others so far worse off than I, and give thanks that the fall wasn't worse and that I have a friend at home allowing me to leave the hospital without too much fuss.

I reiterate old self-labels: I am NOT a Christian. I am "Roman Catholic" in my fashion and my Christ remains the Christ of the Cross. At heart I am NA with GOD the Great Mystery. I really don't care how I'm labeled, for what IT is all about is beyond labeling, and that includes the prissy labels we little mysteries paste on ourselves.

Lest this writing be too ungodly pretentious, one must never fault those who seemingly have no courage. Courage is a gift. Ultimately everything (LIFE) is a gift. Nor do I want to get into some useless wrangle about good and evil — that necessary dichotomy. Try life on earth without dichotomies.

Water from the Side of Christ, wash us.... More exactly, wouldn't it have been blood and water? I puzzle many things like those in torture and pain far beyond that due to my paltry fall. For instance, our blessed brave veterans, combat wounded beyond "livable" repair, but still "repaired" and once in "ordinary life" (as though ordinary life can ever be theirs again) not making it. Twenty-two veterans a day, unable to bear the "crimes against humanity" they've unwittingly committed, commit suicide. Unless WAR is eliminated, the human race will be, setting aside for the moment the environmental changes that may indeed cause extinction.

Within Thy Wounds Hide us.... Pain in itself means little to me other than "the wounds of Christ." I believe that enduring my given share of suffering, acknowledged or not, saves the world. Which is how I understand Christ "saving us from our sins" — an example *par excellence* showing us what to do with the darkness that comes to each of us. From that view, pain (physical, mental, or spiritual), which in itself means little, is paradoxically all-meaningful and powerful.



Something else I've believed for years: howsoever we take care of the dying, so will the dead take care of us. In times of great duress, I seek help from the dead before the living—the beloved dead plus favorite saints, guardian angels (in whom, oh yes, I believe). To all of them, I give thanks.

One cannot be a martyr-bound idiot about pain. One does one's reasonable best to alleviate it. I had three morphine shots at intervals in the hospital. The rest of the time, I was given a "Tylenol drip." For home I was prescribed some narcotic-based pain med of which I took one pill and no more. (I avoid narcotic-based meds except when screamingly necessary.) As of this writing, I get by on roughly 2,000 mgs. of Tylenol spaced out in 500 mg. tablets over 24 hours.

There's a trick to living with pain — chronic or otherwise. One "relaxes" into it; almost "analyzes" it; breathes relatively deeply; says a mantra (I've often spent whole nights mantra-based), and life sort of weirdly takes over. At night, sleep eventually comes. During the day, one goes about doing one's chores. The real bedrock secret, though, is never forgetting that suffering is meaningful and powerful, and is supposed to be.

These remarks on pain obviously are only my view, but this is a view shared by others, with always my youngest niece coming to mind. She's unable to take pain meds, refused the morphine pump that was offered her, and yet, for all the seemingly unendurable chronic pain she'll live with till death, she lives a reasonably contented life of high merit.

In dealing with pain one must avoid gritting one's teeth and stoically enduring. At least that seems to me a no-no, and again I write only about myself and some of my dearest, past and present friends who handle(d) pain as I do.

All night, mysteriously graced, dare to lie in pain and out of pain, hanging on the Cross with Christ. "Enlightenments" beyond all Pain, worth all Pain, will sustain one.

One final thought: "God" is a different, absolutely unique path for each of us. These reflections after a "fall" are merely a sharing of some of my "path," which includes my understanding of Existence: Some day the Sun will blink out, and from the view of Timelessness has. And all that has been/is/will be/ IS and that Timelessness is that IS, and these words are meaningless even when we think they are meaningful. I mean, **we ain't got a clue!** Ω

Consider These Facts

Racial Profiling

"Racial profiling is a long-standing and deeply troubling national problem despite claims that the United States has entered a 'post-racial era.' It occurs every day, in cities and towns across the country, when law enforcement and private security target people of color for humiliating and often frightening detentions, interrogations, and searches without evidence of criminal activity and based on perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, or religion. Racial profiling is patently illegal, violating the Constitution's core promises of equal protection under the law to all and freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures.... It alienates communities from law enforcement, hinders community policing efforts, and causes law enforcement to lose credibility and trust among the people they are sworn to protect and serve."

The ACLU

Aiden Duffy

Racial Disparities in Drug Sentencing

"Five times as many whites are using drugs as African Americans, yet African Americans are sent to prison for drug offenses at 10 times the rate of whites."

The NAACP

Racial Disparities in Incarceration

"Together, African Americans and Hispanics comprised 58% of all prisoners in 2008, even though African Americans and Hispanics make up approximately one quarter of the US population. According to *Unlocking America*, if African Americans and Hispanics were incarcerated at the same rates of whites, today's prison and jail populations would decline by approximately 50%."

The NAACP

Racial Disparity in Employment

"The 2014 African-American unemployment rate was 11.1, more than double the unemployment rate for whites."

US Department of Labor

Racial Disparity in Salaries

"Blacks, who had a four-year bachelor's degree, earned $46,502, or about 78% of the salary for comparably educated whites. Hispanics with bachelor's degrees had an average salary of $44,696, amounting to roughly 75 cents for every dollar made by whites."

Associated Press

Racial Disparity in Life Expectancy

"Blacks continue to live shorter lives than whites in every state in the US. On average, white females live five years longer than black females and white men live seven years longer than black males."

2014 Health Services Research Study at UCLA

How Often Do Police Shoot Unarmed Black Men?

"The killing of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, was no anomaly... As Jeffrey Mittman, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Missouri chapter put it in a statement of condolence to Brown's family, 'Unarmed African-American men are shot and killed by police at an alarming rate....'

But quantifying that pattern is difficult.... No agency appears to track the number of police shootings or killings of unarmed victims in a systematic, comprehensive way."

Mother Jones, *August 15, 2014*

Aiden Duffy

Police Officers Killed in 2014

"One hundred twenty-six police officers were killed in the line of duty, fifty by firearms."

The FBI

Depression in the Police Department

"Every twenty-four to fifty-two hours in this country a police officer takes his or her own life. In fact, statistics indicate two to three times as many officers commit suicide than are killed by suspects. The rate of failed marriages among law enforcement officers is 80% with the average newly married officer divorced after five years. Domestic violence among law enforcement officers is twice the national average. The average life expectancy of an officer is 5-10 years after retirement."

Diana Nielsen

Police Brutality

"Only 8% of citizen complaints of police brutality nation-wide were upheld by the internal units tasked with investigating complaints against their colleagues. In the majority of cases, the police agencies reportedly either 'exonerated' the officers, dismissed the complaints as frivolous, determined that they did not have sufficient evidence, or simply never closed the investigation."

Huffington Post, *January 7, 2015*

Grace Sliwoski

Moonlight Run

by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

A right turn off the highway takes you to the mall.
A left will bring you shortly to the Elks' lodge hall.

That's where we went all summer to race each Thursday night,
until the days grew shorter and began to lose the light.

But a hearty group continues on trails around the lake,
throughout the bitter weather to run for its own sake.

So Vin and I drove out there for a cold December run
expecting something novel, some moon-lit winter fun.

Before we did our warm-up, we bundled up in clothes,
adorned ourselves with head lamps, all vital, you'd suppose.

But after we'd completed our twenty minute jog,
we re-thought all our caution and inner-city fog.

Off came both our jackets, under-armor, and long pants.
We'd run just like it's summer, ignoring reason's can'ts.

Without my glaring head light, my eyes began to see
a landscape so familiar, and yet unknown to me.

The path, the trees, the water, all bathed in lunar glow,
warmed us up like magic, despite the piles of snow.

But then upon the causeway a tree stood by the shore,
a silhouette in moonlight— never noticed it before.

Both of us were awestruck. Vin crossed himself to pray.
Like Frost on his snowy evening, we were tempted to delay.

For just beyond the treeline, shoppers by the score
were racing for fulfillment from tinsel at the store. Ω

Man in a Snorkel Coat

by Paul McNeil

Helen Elstone

In the most sweltering heat
on the middle of the Mass Ave. bridge
the homeless man in the snorkel coat
stops with his plastic bags
of belongings and rests on the sidewalk.
It doesn't matter where he's from
and he is going nowhere in particular;
his goal at the moment is to cross the river.

He watches the normally predictable joggers
run from one end of lunch hour to the other.
We will commute home tonight in cozy cars
and run here again tomorrow.
He will be gone by then, his movements
untrackable, in his snorkel coat cocoon.

I hope he knows he's important
as anyone else crossing the bridge
and in his chronic habit of survival
he finds the revival of his soul. Ω

Editor's Note: The author of this poem was a long-time friend to the Saints Francis & Thérèse Catholic Worker who died on November 25th. This poem first appeared in the December/January 1989-90 Catholic Radical.

Letters

Anthony Russo

Dear friends at St. Francis and Thérèse Catholic Worker,
I read with great interest your latest issue of *The Catholic Radical*. However, one comment made in your article about the foster care system, "Tend my Sheep Ministries," caused me some concern. The statement about the need to terminate parental rights at a faster rate is concerning considering the ever-increasing privatization of the child welfare system across the country.

Here in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the two privatized agencies in charge of judging cases of abuse and neglect also profit when children are taken out of their homes. This is a huge conflict of interest, and we have had many mothers staying with us who have had their children illegally taken away by some of the 169 agencies that subcontract with the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. These are not cases of abuse and neglect. These are cases of Christ's poor being targeted and unfairly persecuted by the agencies being paid to protect them.

While there is definite need for more loving supportive foster parents, there is also a definite need to reform the child welfare system itself and for time to determine if allegations of abuse or neglect are true. This rapid privatization takes needed attention away from cases of real abuse and neglect and hurts homeless families the most. Blessed are the poor!

Mikel Komba
Casa Maria Catholic Worker
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Dear Scott & Claire,
Thanks for taking the time to share what you do with us by your paper. It's fun to have new friends over and subtly have *The Catholic Radical* on my coffee table.

Still wondering how to balance the demands of everyday family maintenance with broader passions around justice, mercy, and peace. But I take inspiration from the fact that you all did it.

My three-and-a-half year-old son, Anthony, is just learning that birthday parties are a time for treats (chocolate). So, while explaining all the things that'll happen on Christmas and why, he said, "So, do we get to go to Jesus' house on Christmas and sing Happy Birthday real loud and get special treats!?!"

Yes, son. That's exactly what will happen.

Liz Fallon Kurtz
Austin, Texas

Short 'n Sweet

by Milton Kerr

Humans
are
perfect in spirit
and flesh that is
flawed.
That's it. Ω

Catholic Worker Calendar

Sunday, February 1, 8, and/or 15: Snow-Tubing: Please gather with us at 1:30 P.M. at 52 Mason Street, and then go sliding at Worcester's Greenhill Park. We will go if there's snow. Bring a tube if you have one. Come discover that snow isn't just an enemy to be shoveled. We will bring hot chocolate to share with everyone. All ages welcome. Call to confirm: 508 753-3588.

Wednesday, February 4 & 25, March 11 & 25 — Mass or Evening Prayer: Come join us in prayer and song at 7 P.M. 52 Mason Street. Followed by refreshments.

Wednesday, February 11— Challenges of Being a Black Man in the Inner City: Please join us for a presentation by Jordan Berg Powers, an active member of Mass Alliance, a coalition of political and advocacy organizations working together to build a progressive community. 7 P.M. 52 Mason Street. Refreshments to follow.

Wednesday, February 18— Challenges of Inner City Policing: Please join us for a presentation by a representative of the Worcester Police Department. Call 753-3588 to confirm. 7 P.M. 52 Mason Street. Refreshments to follow.

Sunday, March 8 — Upholding Saint Patrick, Peacemaker: Please join us on Park Ave, during the Celtic 5K Road Race and the Saint Patrick's Day Parade, as we hold a banner with Saint Patrick's image and words: "Killing cannot be with Christ." On the West side of Park Avenue, between Parker and Chandler street. 10:45 A.M. - 1:30 P.M. Come for as long as you can to proclaim peace in an era of seemingly endless war. Call 508 753-3588 for more information.

Mason Street Musings

The shimmer of Christmas seemed brief this year. We bought our tree late in December, as usual, and Epiphany was celebrated early. The day after we read of Magi wandering behind a Star, I stuffed Christmas lights into boxes and hauled the clutter of our merriment into the attic.

Only the Advent Wheel remained in our living room with its circle of Old Testament prophets – an unholy lot of murderers, visionaries, and disbelievers whose stories, nonetheless, point to Nativity Truth: God is among us here and now.

I felt that truth most keenly the night we caroled. Our many stops included a house on Bellevue Street that is full of refugees. Fateen, an Iraqi mother and devout Muslim, twice displaced by wars in Iraq and Syria, was out on the sidewalk when we arrived, loading platters of food into the car for a family of Syrian refugees who had just come into the city. She smiled awkwardly as we belted out "Joy to the World," beneath street lamps gone dark, then wished us "all good" for 2015 before ducking off.

Our large band of revelers could not all fit into the sparsely furnished apartment of the Congolese who had come out onto the porch to hear us sing. Their small, bare-walled living room had two worn armchairs, an old couch, and not much else. I counted four adults and two children in the place. The tiny boy in bright green sweater was the same height as our eighteen-month-old granddaughter May.

We delivered a mediocre rendition of "We Three Kings," then asked the Congolese to sing for us. After a moment's hesitation, our hosts, lean, handsome people with high cheekbones and skin the color of dark cinnamon, tilted back their heads and launched into a hymn, each one taking a different part. The language was foreign, but we felt the song's sentiment of praise and adoration coming from a place deep within the heart. The harmonious music was so beautiful, many of us had tears in our eyes.

Our Congolese neighbors reminded us of Sweet Honey in the Rock

Our thick stack of Christmas cards and the boxes of cookies and chocolate on the kitchen hutch indicate Christmas 2014 was an abundant one. (Thank you. Thank you, all.) But for me the season's richest gift was our time with the Congolese. Crowded together in that poor, bare room were blacks from a distant land besieged by war, and Americans of varying hue, anxious about our own state of union, singing exuberantly in anticipation of the Incarnation.

Now the planet begins a new orbit around the sun. There are protests in the street at home. Across the ocean, more and more people are fleeing wars that seem to have no end.

Here at the Catholic Worker, the working poor and very poor continue to circle around our kitchen table. J., who does temp work at an auto dealer is squirreling away her daily wage of $50 to get a studio apartment for herself and infant daughter. Yesterday, we said good-bye to the ever-smiling M., one of several guests of late to go from the Catholic Worker to his own room. A global rover, he has lived in Puerto Rico, New York, and Venezuela, where he sold grandfather clocks with his father, and once came face-to-face with a wild boar.

"What's your favorite place?" I asked him. "Worcester," he said, "for this is where God has put me now to do His work."And Worcester is where we are, still doing, I hope, a bit of God's work. Ω

Claire

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